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OF THE

Lincoln-Douglas Debate

Alton, Illinois, October 15, 1858,

AND OF THE

Funeral of Abraham Lincoln

Springfield, Illinois, May 4, 1865,

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18255
Book 90
Pg 173-7

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RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE HELD IN ALTON, ILLINOIS, OCTOBER 15, 1858.

BY EDMOND BEALL, ALTON, ILLINOIS.

Mrs. Jessie Palmer Weber, Secretary and Treasurer, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield, Ill.:

DEAR MADAM—You will remember when we last met in the office of the Historical Association, and I was allowed to examine the statue of Douglas, I told you at the time that it appeared to me as if it looked smaller than he really was. I also remarked that I heard the memorable debate of Lincoln and Douglas, which was held in Alton on October 15, 1858, and, as you stated you would like to have my remembrance of the occasion, I will try and give it to you as nearly as I can. Please remember that I was then a little boy of ten years of age, although my memory of this occasion seems as bright and clear as of things that have happened recently.

It is now fifty-four years since this memorable debate took place and looking backward to that time, in my mind I can see the crowd and remember the events perfectly. The 15th day of October, 1858, was the day on which Lincoln and Douglas were to hold their seventh and final debate at Alton. Early in the morning the farmers began to arrive in the city in almost every kind of vehicle. By noon boats from St. Louis and trains from the North were beginning to arrive. It is estimated that there were from six to ten thousand people present, which in those days was considered a very large assemblage. Lincoln and Douglas both arrived early in the morning. Lincoln was quartered at the Franklin House, now called the Lincoln Hotel, and Douglas at the Alton House, destroyed by fire many years ago. This hotel was on the corner of Front and Alby streets. Each had his friends and, during the morning, there were continual receptions at both hotels.

The committee in charge of the arrangements had erected at the northeast corner of the City Hall a speaker's platform about sixteen feet long by twelve feet wide. About 12:30 p. m. the crowd began to gather about the place. The enthusiasm was very great, many carrying

banners, flags, and all kinds of devices to show the strength of their side. On Market street between Second and Third, on the side of this hill as it now is, there stood at that time an old frame market house, and, during those days, all meats and vegetables were sold only from the market house. No stores were allowed to keep anything of this kind, but all had to go to the market house for provisions of all kinds excepting groceries. Around this building was a railing where the farmers and those having country produce for sale hitched their teams. At that time, being a very small boy, I perched myself on the railing on the south side of the market house, just, you might say, across the street from where the speaking was to take place. About 1:30 Lincoln and Douglas took their seats on the stand, and as they mounted the steps on to the platform, I remember I never heard so much shouting and hurrahing in my life. The ovation they received was tremendous. Douglas was first introduced, and, when he rose to speak, I thought he had been rightly named "The Little Giant." He was not, if my recollection serves me right, over five feet four inches tall. Around the platform there was a railing made of two by fours, about four feet high, and this railing reached nearly to Douglas' shoulders. Just before he began speaking he was interrupted by a certain gentleman, but no attention was paid to him, so Douglas began his speech. He spoke for about an hour or an hour and a half. I noticed at the time that he spoke his words very distinctly, but in a very blustering manner, and so to speak "frothed at the mouth" when he became excited. During the speech Lincoln sat at the rear of the platform, leaning back against the wall of the City Hall, close to the spot where the Memorial Tablet is now placed. He did not look up, nor did he make notes of any remark that Douglas was making, but after Douglas finished speaking, Lincoln rose in a dignified manner, stood in about the same place that Douglas had stood, and looked over the audience. He appeared like a giant in comparison with Douglas. I understand he was six feet three inches in height. Every one was astounded at the difference in the height of the two men. Lincoln was tall and sparely built, Douglas short and fleshy. I could not distinguish a word that was spoken, but I remember there was a peculiar twang to Lincoln's words and that he was cool and collected. His general style and appearance were the same as that of the Honorable L. Y. Sherman of this State, and he looked more like him than any one I have ever seen since, only he was taller; otherwise he cut about the same figure as Sherman. The demonstration was great and both were applauded, but in those dark times of our nation, no one predicted what was before us. From that time on Lincoln rose to the highest pinnacle of fame.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE ASSASSINATION AND FUNERAL OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

BY EDMOND BEALL, ALTON ILLINOIS.

Mrs. Jessie Palmer Weber, Secretary and Treasurer, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield, Ill.:

DEAR MADAM—Referring to recent conversation I had with you regarding my recollections of the assassination and funeral of Abraham Lincoln, and by your request, I give you below a brief letter regarding those events as nearly as I can remember them.

Looking backward a half century or more, my memory of things that happened fifty or even fifty-five years ago is better than it is of things that happened two or three years ago; although when I was a little boy and would hear people talking of things that happened twenty years ago, it seemed to me then like the life of a nation. As I have now passed three-score years, I can remember things that happened fifty-five years ago more readily than those that happened a short time ago. The following is a matter that is firmly impressed on my mind, and all the events are brought before me as clearly as though they happened yesterday.

On April 15, 1865, the news flashed over the wires that President Lincoln had been assassinated. I can not think of anything that has ever transpired in this country that the people were more excited over, in fact, everything seemed paralyzed—business ceased, no one seemed to realize what had happened. I was at that time working for the firm of J. and D. Millen. We received word about 9:00 a. m. on April 15th of the sad calamity. There was a Frenchman working for the Millen firm by the name of Beasley. He made the remark that he was glad of it. No sooner had he said this than one of the men struck him over the head with a bar of iron. They had to carry him home on a stretcher, but no arrest was made, and in St. Louis many were shot down in the streets for making like remarks—this to show you the feeling at that time. Every home was draped and the whole nation was in mourning. It seemed as though everyone wished to do something to show how much he loved our President.

Immediately after the news reached Alton, the management of the Chicago & Alton Railroad Company issued orders for all the carpenters employed by them to report at once to Springfield to decorate and do the necessary erecting of arches for the funeral. There was living at Alton at that time a man by the name of Chaffee, who had charge of all the bridge and carpenter work on this railroad. He had a son by the name of Shipley—we called him “Ship” for short. Mr. Chaffee told us if we wanted to go, he would take us with him to Springfield. We, of course, were glad of the opportunity, so left Alton on the 19th day of April, and when we arrived in Springfield, found great sorrow, in fact, the people seemed as if they had lost all heart.

The first task to which we were assigned was to drape Lincoln’s home in mourning. I, being slender and about sixteen years of age, was told to put the droopers on the eaves of the house and to fasten the droopers with rosettes about eight feet apart. I was let down the roof with a rope. Mrs. Tilton occupied the home. She came to the window near where I was working and told me to be sure and get them eight feet apart. I replied I could hardly do so, as I was lying on my stomach and could not gauge the distance. She went up into the store-room where all of Lincoln’s furniture was stored and procured a two foot rule, passing it down to me with the remark that she had taken it from Lincoln’s old desk, and I could keep it when I had completed my task. This rule I prized highly, but it was lost in after years.

After we had completed this piece of work, we were sent to the Capitol to erect a catafalque for the remains. We worked there for some time, and, with the architect, erected a beautiful temporary resting place for the President. There was quite a controversy during all this time as to where Lincoln’s remains were to finally be placed. The citizens of Springfield offered to donate or erect a tomb on what was then called the Mather place. In fact, they partially erected a vault. This plot of ground is where the present State Capitol is now located. Mrs. Lincoln would not consent to this and it looked at that time as if no suitable place would be selected. All attempts to persuade her to change her mind were of no avail, and just three days before the body arrived in Springfield, she made up her mind that Oak Ridge was the only place she desired or would consent to as place of interment. Then the trouble began. There was only a temporary vault in Oak Ridge on the side of a hill. Seats had to be built for the choir, and we all hurried off to the cemetery to erect the seats. The choir of three hundred voices must be provided for. We had to work two days and one night to complete the work in time, and, when through, we were a tired lot. Our meals were

provided by the sexton, whose residence was in the grounds on the top of the hill.

I was pretty well acquainted in Springfield, having been a soldier in the Civil War, and was on duty in Springfield quite a time before I was discharged. I had no trouble in procuring a place where my chum and I could secure a lodging during the period from April 19th to May 4th. The city was crowded from the time the news was received of the assassination until the funeral ceremonies. The funeral cortege left Washington April 21st. Frequent stops were made along the route to allow the people to view the remains and pay tribute to our martyred President. The morning of May 3rd dawned bright and clear, and from daylight until the arrival of the funeral train the streets were blocked and it was almost impossible to reach the Chicago and Alton depot. As I wore a badge which allowed me all the privileges, I took advantage of this and was on the platform where I could see all. About 8:40 the pilot engine arrived, draped in mourning, and at 9:00 o'clock the funeral train pulled into the depot. It had been on the road about twelve days since leaving Washington. It was almost impossible to keep the crowd back. A splendid hearse was waiting and after the body was placed in the hearse, the American flag was placed over the casket. This flag bore thirty-six stars, as we had but thirty-six states at that time. Pickpockets were very numerous. I remember General Joe Hooker spying one, as the pickpocket was robbing one of the spectators, and he gave the thief a kick that sent him not less than ten to fifteen feet. Fighting Joe, as he was called, was a medium sized man with a face almost as red as that of an Indian. After all was ready, the sad cortege wound its way up to the old Capitol. At 10:00 o'clock the north end doors swung open and the crowd began to come in there, winding along up a pair of steps, around the coffin, then down the south steps and out the south door. I was stationed near the foot of the casket to divide the crowd, and was on duty there all day long and part of the night. I might state here that I heard the undertaker, who came with the remains, say to a gentleman present, that the brains and viscera had all been removed immediately after his death and that the body was filled with embalming fluid. As stated above, the doors were thrown open and the immense crowd allowed to view the remains. They came in six abreast, and all that day and night until ten the next morning there was a constant stream. The catafalque was arranged so that those viewing the remains could get a full view as per diagram shown.

The morning of the 4th of May, 1865, was, I believe, the hottest day I have ever experienced. Many were prostrated with heat, among them

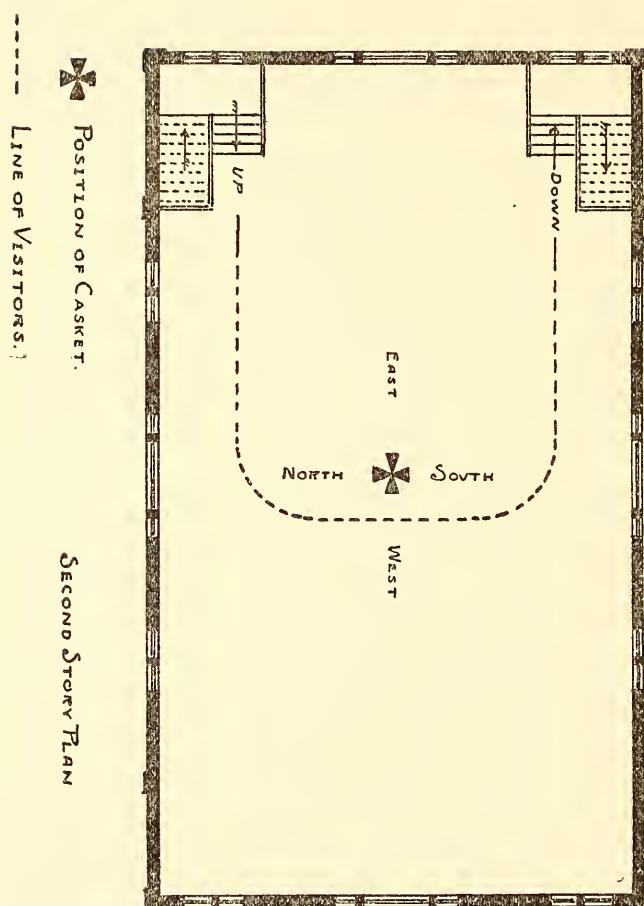


Diagram of Second Floor of Old State House, now Sangamon County Court House.

the mayor, whose name I think was Vredenburgh.* At 10:00 o'clock the funeral cortege was formed. General Hooker, with all the high officials of the United States and the State officers, was at the head. After marching around the principal streets they went to Oak Ridge, Lincoln's final resting place. As the sad procession entered the gates, the choir, about three hundred in number, accompanied by one of the largest and best bands from Washington, sang a solemn dirge. While the remains were being placed in the vault, the choir solemnly rendered the "Dead March in Saul." The sermon was delivered by Reverend Simpson of the Methodist Episcopal church. After remarks by others, and a prayer, the choir sang the doxology, and after the benediction was given, all dispersed to their several homes.

There was a tremendous throng of people in Springfield during the funeral ceremonies. To secure a meal or a room at one of the hotels was out of the question. Private houses were thrown open, and all the churches and organizations of all kinds gave free use of their rooms and halls. I know from actual experience that there was little difference between the crowds in the streets all night long, the night Lincoln's body lay in the State House, and those during the day. In fact, there was no such thing as sleep for the mourning nation, or at the home of Lincoln. As I look backward forty-seven years and think of the leaders of the United States and of our beloved State at that time, I cannot recall any of those who are alive today.

* Mr. John S. Vredenburgh was Mayor of Springfield at the time of the assassination of Mr. Lincoln, but on April 17, 1865, he was succeeded in the office by Mr. Thos. J. Dennis, who was Mayor at the time of the funeral.—Editor.

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